



USAID | UZBEKISTAN

CASE STUDY

Communities Challenge HIV Stigma

A USAID-funded project helps Uzbek communities step up HIV prevention



A collage of drawings to remember those who died from HIV/AIDS. Photo: CAPACITY

“The USAID-supported approach allows broad involvement of community organizations in HIV prevention in Uzbekistan. Education through Mahallas will enhance the knowledge of general population about HIV and will help reduce stigma and discrimination of groups most vulnerable to HIV”

- Ms. Gulnora Yulchieva, Deputy Head of the Republican Fund Mahalla

Challenge

HIV/AIDS infection in Uzbekistan is mostly contained among the injecting drug users and sex workers. These people are often treated with hostility by the society at large which is often ignorant about the infection and the ways of protection. A recent survey indicates that 69% of Uzbeks think that people with HIV/AIDS should be isolated, 40% think that HIV can be contracted at workplace, and 78% think that only groups at risk can be infected with HIV. Moreover, groups that are most at risk to contract HIV/AIDS are also among the least aware about the ways to protect themselves.

Initiative

The USAID-funded CAPACITY project designed an innovative way to educate the local communities on HIV prevention. The project suggested channeling such education through Mahallas - the administrative, territorial, and social units functioning on the base of traditional communities with significant influence on the community members. With 10,000 Mahallas throughout the country, the USAID project saw them as the best way to reach out to the population. Together with local organizations CAPACITY designed a two-day interactive training module for Mahalla leaders on HIV prevention and reduction of stigma and discrimination towards vulnerable groups. To ensure the sustained use of the model, the project helped key stakeholders on addressing the issue - the World Bank, Republican Fund Mahalla, and the Ministry of Health - develop a joint action plan.

Results

In December 2007 the training module for Mahalla leaders was approved by the Uzbek Ministry of Health, and since then, the USAID project has trained over 200 Makhalla leaders from five pilot regions in its use. In turn, Mahalla leaders apply the model to teach their communities about HIV/AIDS. “Education through Mahallas will enhance the knowledge of general population about HIV and will help reduce stigma and discrimination of groups most vulnerable to HIV,” says Gulnora Yulchieva, Deputy Head of the Republican Fund Mahalla.

In 2009, the project is planning to conduct a survey on the results of the model. If it demonstrates a significant impact, the Ministry of Health is planning to replicate this approach country-wide.